Crown 8vo or Small Crown 8vo. Cloth. 7s. net a volume. Postage 6d.

MODERN PLAYS

Plays by Leonid Andreyeff. (THE BLACK MASKERS, THE LIFE OF MAN, THE SABINE WOMEN.)

Plays by Björnstjërne Björnson. First Series. (THE GAUNTLET, BEYOND OUR POWER, THE NEW SYSTEM.)

Plays by Björnstjërne Björnson. Second Series. (LOVE AND GEOGRAPHY, BEYOND HUMAN MIGHT, LABOREMUS.)

Plays by Mrs W. K. Clifford. (HAMILTON'S SECOND MARRIAGE, THOMAS AND THE PRINCESS, THE MODERN WAY.)

Plays by John Galsworthy. First Series. (JOY, STRIFE, THE SILVER BOX.)

Plays by John Galsworthy. Second Series. (JUSTICE, THE LITTLE DREAM, THE ELDEST SON.)

Plays by John Galsworthy. Third Series. (THE PIGEON, THE FUGITIVE, THE MOB.)

Plays by John Galsworthy. Fourth Series. (A BIT O' LOVE, THE SKIN GAME, THE FOUNDATIONS.)

Plays by Gwen John. (OUTLAWS, CORINNA, SEALING THE COMPACT, EDGE O' DARK, THE CASE OF THERESA, IN THE RECTOR'S STUDY.)

Four Tragedies. By Allan Monkhouse. (THE HAYLING FAMILY, THE STRICKLANDS, RESENTMENT, REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.)

Plays by Eden Phillpotts. (THE MOTHER, THE SHADOW, THE SECRET WOMAN.)

Plays by August Strindberg. First Series. (THE DREAM PLAY, THE LINK, THE DANCE OF DEATH, Part I., THE DANCE OF DEATH, Part II.)

Plays by August Strindberg. Second Series. (CREDITORS, PARIAH, THERE ARE CRIMES AND CRIMES, MISS JULIA, THE STRONGER.)

Plays by August Strindberg. Third Series. (ADVENT, SIMOOM, SWAN WHITE, DEBIT AND CREDIT, THE THUNDER STORM, AFTER THE FIRE.)

Plays by August Strindberg. Fourth Series. (THE BRIDAL CROWN, THE SPOOK SONATA, THE FIRST WARNING, GUSTAVUS VASA.)

Plays by Anton Tchekoff. First Series. (UNCLE VANYAH, IVANOFF, THE SEAGULL, THE SWAN SONG.)

Plays by Anton Tchekoff. Second Series. (THE CHERRY ORCHARD, THE THREE SISTERS, THE BEAR, THE PROPOSAL, THE MARRIAGE, THE ANNIVERSARY, A TRAGEDIAN.)

Several of the above Plays can be had singly. Cloth binding, 3s. net; paper covers, 2s. 6d. net; postage 4d.

Full list is given in the Publishers' general catalogue, a copy of which will be sent on application

---

DUCKWORTH & CO., Publishers
COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.2

CURTAIN RAISERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Uniform with this Volume

"THE SECRET WOMAN"

A Drama in Five Acts

CURTAIN RAISERS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

LONDON

DUCKWORTH AND CO.

HENRIETTA ST. COVENT GARDEN

FIRST IMPRESSION 1912
SECOND IMPRESSION 1920

Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh

CONTENTS

THE POINT OF VIEW

CHARACTERS

JOHNNY ROWLAND, aged 60. *A kind-hearted old bachelor. Host of the "Plume of Feathers."*

NOAH BASSETT, aged 25. *A carpenter. Very careless of his attire, and slovenly in his habits.*

MELINDA BASSETT, aged 22. *His wife. Neat, dapper and sharp-tongued.*

THE POINT OF VIEW

SCENE: *The little parlour of the* BASSETS. *A lamp burns on a table; a window with a low sill opens upon the night at back; the door is on the left of window and the fire-place is on the right. Great neatness characterises the room. There are coloured prints of familiar and famous pictures from Christmas numbers of "The Graphic" and "Illustrated London News," upon the walls. Also a framed and glazed diploma of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes. A suite of cheap furniture is distributed round the room with withering precision. The two arm-chairs have antimacassars over them, and stand on each side of the fire-place. Upon the window-sill are plants in pots; one is a large red-flowered cactus. The mantelpiece supports a gilt clock under a glass shade, with candlesticks and brightly coloured china on each side of it. Photographs in frames, a few large, brightly bound books, and a glass case of stuffed birds occupy the table. There is a chair drawn beside it, and a woman's workbox stands open under the lamp.*

MELINDA. [*Off.*] You low-minded, mean-spirited trash! A worm's prouder than you—and a pig's cleaner!

NOAH. [*Off.*] You shut your mouth, or I'll slap your

face! You'll drive me mad with your pride. [*Enter* MELINDA *with* NOAH *behind her.*] You puff yourself up like the frog in the story, and I wish you'd burst like him—then I'd have peace!

MELINDA. Get out of this, anyway! I won't have you in here in them beastly clothes.

NOAH. For two pins I'd—[*Breaks off and laughs.*] All right. I'll go where I'm welcome, and that's everywhere—everywhere—but in my own home.

MELINDA. "Welcome"! A fool with money's always welcome. Go down to the "Plume of Feathers"—that's the place for you.

NOAH. And you nip across the road and tell your mother what a worthless dog you've married.

[*Goes out.*

MELINDA. [*Turning to door.*] Noah!

NOAH. [*Off.*] Good night!

MELINDA. [*Goes to window.*] Noah!

NOAH. [*Passes window.*] Good night!

MELINDA. [*Out of window.*] You're a cowardly devil!

[NOAH'S *retreating feet are heard.* MELINDA *stands at the window till the sound ceases. Then she approaches the table and sits down beside it, and puts her hands over her face for a few moments. Soon she rouses herself and turns over her mending. She finds a sock with a hole in it, and threads a darning-needle. A footstep outside makes her start.* JOHNNY ROWLAND *looks in at the window.*

JOHNNY. Hullo, Melinda Bassett! All alone?

MELINDA. My stars, Mr. Rowland! You're not standing on my geraniums, I hope?

JOHNNY. No, no, not I—too fond of flowers for that. Where's Noah?

MELINDA. He's just gone down to swill at your public-house, and tell everybody he's had no luck with his wife.

JOHNNY. Gone to the "Plume of Feathers"? Then I must have missed him by half a minute. May I come in?

MELINDA. And welcome.

[JOHNNY *disappears.* MELINDA *rises and throws a dust-sheet over one of the arm-chairs. She wheels it nearer her own. Enter* JOHNNY. *They shake hands.*

JOHNNY. I've wanted a chat this longful time.

MELINDA. Will you sit here?

JOHNNY. No, I'll go by the window—then I can smoke and spit in the garden. I know what a tidy woman you are.

MELINDA. [*Unseen by* JOHNNY *makes a face.*]

JOHNNY. I'm come about a ticklish matter, my dear, but we old bachelors sometimes rush in where married folk fear to tread. 'Tis terrible rash, and I daresay I'd fare better in a den of lions; but I'll chance it for friendship and good-will. [*He lights his pipe. Pause.* MELINDA *threads her needle.*] Mending his socks, I see? And I daresay you wish you could mend his manners, too?

MELINDA. A road-mender has got better manners than him.

JOHNNY. Not a very clean man neither.

[*He puts his feet up on a chair.* MELINDA *shows irritation.*

MELINDA. I told him cleanliness was next door to godliness, and he said he wouldn't mind that if 'twasn't next door to a damn bad temper also—meaning me.

JOHNNY. Oh dear! Oh dear!

[*Johnny rises, spits out of the window, and puts his pipe down in the cactus pot. He approaches* MELINDA.

JOHNNY. Melinda, you must listen to me.

MELINDA. That's the cactus what my grandmother gave me under her will when she died, and I think a good lot of it.

JOHNNY. And right to do so. 'Tis a masterpiece. [*Takes pipe away and puts it in his pocket. Brings chair up and sits with his arms crossed over the back of it near to* MELINDA.] Now I know very well that an everyday sort of woman wouldn't listen to me for a minute, but you—. 'Tis like this: you and Noah cant quite get at each other's point of view—ain't I right now?

MELINDA. His point of view be Number One—first and last and always.

JOHNNY. So's everybody's. You and Noah are both strong creatures with strong wills and strong opinions. You wouldn't have took up with a weak, shambling

sort of man—too proud for that. And he wouldn't have looked at one of they draggle-tailed trollops, such as we could mention.

MELINDA. I wish he had; then they'd have lived in the dirt together, so happy as a pair of beetles under a stone, till the roof fell on 'em.

JOHNNY. Not at all. He's terrible proud of you. Behind your back he'll often weary a whole bar at "The Plume," because he will sing your vartues in season and out.

MELINDA. He never sings 'em at home.

JOHNNY. Along of a shy feeling as comes over him. There's nought cows a man so bad as to find that his wife can lash with her tongue; and it often comes as a cruel surprise after wedded life begins, because the females keep that razor in its case till the deed's done.

[*He rises and walks about.* MELINDA *looks up from her darning.*

MELINDA. Don't stop—'tis very interesting.

JOHNNY. Now we come to the point of view. If you make yourself look at the world through Noah's eyes——

MELINDA. Why can't he see life through my eyes? Why can't he see dirt and slovenly ways and bad language like I see 'em?

JOHNNY. You must try to remember what a wonder he is. A regular burning fiery phœnix you might say, and a master carpenter at twenty-five. And great men do turn their women's hair grey, Melinda—'tis

an unfortunate law of Nature, and they always have and always will.

MELINDA. A great man?

JOHNNY. Certainly he is. [*Steps heard outside.*

MELINDA. The great man's come home, seemingly. Now you can have a dash at him. [*Rises and puts up her work.*] 'Tis his turn to smart a bit now. You try to hammer some sense into his brain; and speak careful, for he's not so patient as me. Funny his own wife shouldn't know he was a bit out of the common!

[*Goes out very coldly as* NOAH BASSETT *comes to the window.*

NOAH. Hullo, Johnny!

JOHNNY. Having a bit of talk with your missis, Noah.

NOAH. No accounting for tastes. And she let you smoke in the parlour—eh? My stars!

[*He climbs in through the window and knocks over the big red cactus. The pot breaks and the plant falls in half.*

NOAH. Ha-ha! My wife will twitter about that! That's Grandmother Coaker that is—and the thorns on it are pretty near as sharp as Melinda's tongue.

[*He laughs, but makes no attempt to clean up the mess. He puts a piece of newspaper on the table from his pocket.*

NOAH. A couple of bloaters for supper. When Melinda gives me a dusting I always go and buy her a bloater. If you can only find what a long-tongued woman likes to eat, you can often stop her.

[*He moves about and reduces the room to disorder. He puts his hat on one chair, turns up the lamp and lights a cigar.*

NOAH. One of yours, Johnny, and three halfpence is too much for 'em. [*Blows out a cloud of smoke.*

JOHNNY. Man, man! you ought to be properly ashamed of yourself! 'Tis a disgrace and a crying shame to do what you do.

NOAH. Damn it, innkeeper, can't a chap come in his own house through the window if he wants to? Or down the chimney either?

JOHNNY. Don't you answer me in that tone of voice, because I won't have it from a boy like you. 'Tis not worthy of a master carpenter. You make Melinda suffer in her tenderest point, which is her famous passion for soap and water. And every dirty thumb mark is a nail in the coffin of her pride!

NOAH. Is it, by gum? If thumb marks be nails in the coffin of her pride, I'd very soon plant 'em from the top of the house to the bottom! [*He rises and walks about. He flings off his coat, wipes his forehead on one of the antimacassars, and drops it on the ground.*] Pride—pride—cuss her pride! She's house-proud and clothes-proud and family-proud and face-proud and voice-proud, and everything but husband-proud. Her point of view——

JOHNNY. The very word I said to her. All you've got to do is to see how life looks to her; and all she's

got to do is to see how life looks to you. Then you'll lift her eyes and she'll clear yours. And you'll praise her soap-and-water ideas—and use soap and water oftener yourself; and she'll allow for your tricks and queer ways a bit more; and there'll come the peace that passeth all understanding between you.

[JOHNNY *has spoken very earnestly. He mops his head and shows exhaustion.*

NOAH. Well, the sooner she starts, the better for me. I'll get some beer now. You be dry inside and wet out by the look of it. Take off your coat.

[*Goes to door.*

JOHNNY. Fetch along three glasses, Noah, and call your missus. We'll drink together.

NOAH. [*Goes off.*] Melinda! Come and have a drop of beer along with me and Johnny Rowland.

JOHNNY. [*Takes off his coat and cools himself.*] Phew! Took it down like mother's milk; but will they keep it down?

[*Enter* NOAH *with a tray, a large, brown cloam jug, and three glasses.*

JOHNNY. Don't—don't set your tray on the bloaters! Now us'll all drink to the point of view, for no home be complete without it.

NOAH. You're thrown away at the "Plume of Feathers," Johnny. You ought to be along with the open-air preachers. [*Enter* MELINDA. *She has been*

crying.] Pour him a glass of beer, Melinda; his throat's as dry as a toast.

[MELINDA *pours out beer and hands it to* JOHNNY *and* NOAH.

NOAH. Don't you mind the dust. 'Tis nothing to the dust Johnny has been kicking up. Such a clever man as he is. And he's showed me all my sins. And he's told me you're a wife in ten thousand. Of course I didn't know that. And I ought to wash oftener; and oughtn't to come through the parlour window; and I oughtn't to bring you home a fresh-cured bloater for your supper and put it on this here table.

MELINDA. And I've heard what a clever man you are. Great news for me, of course. How should your own wife know it? I'm to look at everything from your point of view for evermore, Noah.

[JOHNNY *smiles and nods and sips his beer.*

NOAH. And though only a master carpenter, with men under me and so on, of course, where my love and pride and hope and joy are set, I've failed—wickedly failed—as Rowland tells me.

MELINDA. You haven't failed. I'm far too quick to put my point of view afore yours—more shame to me.

NOAH. I won't have that, Melinda. Good powers! Why shouldn't you have your own point of view? Dammy! And didn't you take a dozen prizes at boarding school? Ban't they here spread out on this table under them bloaters at this moment?

[JOHNNY *nods and shows continued pleasure.*

NOAH. I was wrong to come in the window—yes, I was. What the devil's the door for?

MELINDA. Come in how you please, so long as you *do* come in. I've often done enough to keep you away, goodness knows, with my silly, old-maid fidgets. [ROWLAND *is somewhat moved and shows emotion at the reconciliation.*] I didn't want Mr. Rowland to run over my countless faults.

NOAH. [*Casts an unfriendly look at* JOHNNY ROWLAND, *whose countenance changes.*] I won't have you sing small, Melindy. 'Tis I that am the reckless, rash, good-for-nothing, and haven't got no business to be a master carpenter with two assistants and a coffin hand.

MELINDA. [*Sharply to* JOHNNY ROWLAND, *who is staring in surprise, and forgets the glass in his hands.*] You're spilling your beer on my carpet!

JOHNNY. [*Pulls himself together.*] No, no, I ain't, Melinda.

NOAH. "Mrs. Bassett" to you, please!

MELINDA. I've cried to-night—cried till my handkerchief was wet through. And your point of view be mine, Noah—for richer, for poorer; and if you think I don't love you—dirty or clean—you're wrong. And if you think I'd change a hair of your head—unless 'twas a grey one or two brought there by my wicked tongue, you're wrong. [*She becomes tearful.*

NOAH. I shall get angered with somebody in a minute. To make a woman cry—and that woman another man's wife—and that wife the bestest wife on

God's earth! 'Tis a cowardly trick and 'twould be better in my opinion if we all stuck to our own job, and the publicans kept behind their bars and left the carpenters to mind their own blessed business.

[*Walks about angrily.*

MELINDA. For a man to tell me your virtues! Didn't I marry you for 'em? 'Twas you I wanted, not your collars, nor yet the blacking on your boots.

NOAH. Let somebody put that in his pipe and smoke it.

MELINDA. Don't ask the man to smoke no more—smell the room!

JOHNNY. Look here, look here, my young shavers, you be going a thought too fast. Now hear me.

NOAH. We have heard you, and we've heard a damned sight too much of you. There's things a man can do, John Rowland, and there's things a man can't do; and it looks terrible much as if you'd done a thing a man can't do.

MELINDA. A bachelor, too!

NOAH. And knows no more about married life than that bloater.

MELINDA. I daresay he didn't think——

NOAH. That's no excuse.

MELINDA. From his point of view.

NOAH. Stop there! I don't want no more points of view. 'Twill be the point of something else in a minute! There's a place for everything, and his

place wasn't to wait till my back was turned and then sneak in here and bully-rag you.

MELINDA. Or sit and spit through the window on my geraniums.

NOAH. Good powers! A snuffling old man like you, to lecture her!

MELINDA. And sit blowing your smoke into my window-curtains as if 'twas your tap-room.

NOAH. 'Tis a very great pity you can't see yourself to-night as others see you, Rowland, because if you could, you'd see a very silly, meddling old fool.

MELINDA. A bachelor too!

NOAH. No proper woman would have looked at him.

JOHNNY. Don't say that, my son. Why, afore you two were born, I——

NOAH. We won't hear none of *your* adventures. Everybody knows what you psalm-singing chaps were in your young days. [*Turns to* MELINDA.] When I came in through thicky window, I knocked grandmother sideways and broke her in half, and there she lies, and I confess it.

MELINDA. What then? 'Tis only a pinch of dust and we shall have two plants for one.

NOAH. There! That's sense for your nonsense, John Rowland. And never even invited here—never even invited—unless you asked him?

MELINDA. *I* ask him? Not very likely? He came in and was at my throat like a tiger before I knew what had happened. An old bachelor of all people!

JOHNNY. I don't want quite so much "old bachelor," please.

MELINDA. More do we.

NOAH. A bald-headed, ancient crow pushing into a happy home and talking about sacred things, like a man's bath and a woman's Lord knows what. Good powers! it passes belief! D'you see what you might have done? You might have separated us for evermore! Proper devil's work, and you sit there like a brazen serpent and care nothing.

MELINDA. He was laughing a minute ago.

NOAH. "Laughing"—"laughing"—I'll larn him to laugh! Drinking my beer and sitting on as if he was stuck to the chair. [*To* ROWLAND.] Be you going to live here?

MELINDA. He'll tell everybody that we lead a cat and dog life now and turn the people from us.

NOAH. Let him dare—let him dare do that! [*Bangs the table with his fist.*] Let me hear your name, or mine, on his lips again, and, old as he is, I'll horse-whip him afore his own public-house!

MELINDA. A thing like you is a canker in any place.

NOAH. I'll fright the people away from your pub—to a man I'll fright 'em away. A wolf in sheep's clothing—that's what you be!

MELINDA. And you can tell the married men that while they are down there drinking his beer, he's home trying to ruin them with their wives.

JOHNNY. Melindy!

MELINDA. And next we shall hear he's trying to ruin the wives, as well as the husbands, I shouldn't wonder.

JOHNNY. [*Rising.*] Well—that lets me out, my dears! I've heard enough. [*Puts on his coat.*

NOAH. You've done your wicked best to make an everlasting quarrel between a loving man and his lawful female.

MELINDA. And I'll never forgive you—never.

NOAH. And more won't I.

MELINDA. And you can go knowing that you failed, and you did ought to smart to your dying day when you think of it. [JOHNNY *goes to the door slowly.*

NOAH. And if anything on earth could make me love this woman more fierce and faithful than what I do, 'twould be your deadly game to set me against her.

MELINDA. And the same here.

JOHNNY. [*Going to the door.*] If I had a tail, I'd put it between my legs—I can't say no more than that.

[*Exit.*

NOAH. Phew! The terror that flies by night—that man. Come here you blessed woman!

MELINDA. To have you alone all to myself, Noah!

[*They embrace.* JOHNNY *looks in at the window.*

JOHNNY. Thicky hat, if you can spare a minute, my dears. [NOAH *and* MELINDA *start apart.*

MELINDA. On the geraniums again!

NOAH. Ban't we never to be free of you?

[*Flings hat out of the window, pulls down blind and sits in arm-chair. They listen to* JOHNNY'S *departing feet. The gate slams.*

MELINDA. He's gone?

NOAH. *Come* here—close—close!

[MELINDA *sits on his lap and they put their arms round each other and kiss.*

CURTAIN.

HIATUS

CHARACTERS

SIR HUBERT INNES, BART., aged 60. *A connoisseur.*

LEONARD BASSETT, aged 45. *Editor of "The Beacon."*

RIX *Commissionaire.*

BOY.

JANE STURT, aged 38. *Art editor of "The Beacon."*

AMY PRODGERS, aged 40. *A grocer's wife.*

HIATUS

SCENE: *Miss* JANE STURT'S *room at the office of "The Beacon" newspaper. A comfortable chamber, furnished in dark wood. A desk with writing upon it and litter of letters, &c. Beside it, on the floor, lie one or two books. An electric light in a shade of red stands upon the desk. The writer's chair has been pushed away. A fire burns brightly at right of room. The walls are of self colour, and upon them hang half a dozen large reproductions of Botticelli's pictures: Primavera, The Venus and the tondi of The Crowning of the Virgin. Over the fire-place is a large photographic reproduction of a portrait. It represents a man with frowning forehead and strong, heavy face—a face not physically handsome, but suggesting intellect and ideality—such a face as Nietzsche's. There is an arm-chair by the fire, and a few touches about the room suggest a woman. A book-shelf with glass doors at back. A blind is drawn over the window. A bowl of flowers stands at one corner of the mantelpiece, and a box of cigarettes lies near it.*

The room is empty. Upon the rise of the curtain a knock is heard at the door. After a moment's interval the knock is repeated.

Enter LEONARD BASSETT *and* SIR HUBERT INNES.

The latter wears a big fur-lined coat and carries his hat in his hand.

BASSETT. Miss Sturt's not here, Sir Hubert. But she never missed an appointment in her life, so you won't have to wait long.

SIR HUBERT. Anybody might be forgiven. The fog is dreadful.

BASSETT. She laughs at fog. Fog can't live with Jane.

[*He turns on two electric lights at either side of the mantelshelf and reveals the room.*

SIR HUBERT. You are right. There is a wonderful, swift clearness in her work. You are fortunate to have her on your paper.

BASSETT. Don't I know it! She's made "The Beacon"; it's the only daily that counts in art. And such a marvel to work!

SIR HUBERT. [*Looking at the pictures.*] Something of a rebel where my hero is concerned. But her monograph has some lovely things in it. She very nearly convinces me. Still, I'm going to try and convince her.

BASSETT. You amateurs! Why, all the authorities worship the monograph.

SIR HUBERT. Then perhaps she'll convince me.

[*He takes off his coat.*

BASSETT. Beauty—and the search for it. That sums her life—worse luck.

SIR HUBERT. "Worse luck"?

BASSETT. For me. Sit down and warm yourself.

[SIR HUBERT *sits in arm-chair.* BASSETT *takes box of cigarettes from mantelpiece and offers him one. They both smoke.*

SIR HUBERT. Miss Sturt won't mind?

BASSETT. She likes it. Yes. "worse luck for me," because—oh well—a search and nothing but a search is so beastly unsatisfying. I wanted her to marry, you know.

SIR HUBERT. Whom?

BASSETT. Leonard Bassett, Editor of "The Beacon." But——

[*Shakes his head.*

SIR HUBERT. I'm sorry for you.

BASSETT. We're very good chums. [*Points to a portrait over the mantelpiece.*] That's *her* guiding star.

SIR HUBERT. Poor John Linklater. He's dying, they tell me.

BASSETT. Fast. May go any moment. The last of the big 'uns. A tyrant where art was concerned —a great child in everything else. It ought to be Westminster Abbey; but, of course, it won't be.

SIR HUBERT. Greek to the soul, that man.

BASSETT. A grand pagan. How he barred advertising! Even his old pals couldn't get a line out of him—to print.

SIR HUBERT. Did Miss Sturt know him well?

BASSETT. Rather! She was his secretary for years. Then he refused to employ her any longer about his

affairs and bade her be up and doing on her own. Of course, her wonderful taste and feeling came largely from him. She says he taught her all she knows—made her style—formed her judgment—everything.

SIR HUBERT. She is wrong there. I know his novels exceedingly well. They are magnificent, but belong to another world than this.

BASSETT. His women are the wonder. Never supposed to have cared a cuss about anybody but his wife, and yet—how he knew them!

SIR HUBERT. They, too, are Greek. They belong to that beautiful world of his; they are grander both in goodness and wickedness than the women of to-day. But he never quite understood modern woman or her aims.

BASSETT. So Jane says. She's going to write his biography. He promised that to her. It knocked him clean out when his wife drifted away. He had no sympathy with the actual—so Jane always says. Lived in the clouds.

SIR HUBERT. His wife was a very lovely woman.

BASSETT. Lovely as they make 'em.

[BASSETT *rings an electric bell.*

SIR HUBERT. If there are no women in it, the biography will be dull.

BASSETT. Dull! Nothing that Jane ever wrote could be dull. [*Enter* RIX.] Where's Miss Sturt, Rix?

RIX. She was here before four, sir. Then, about

five, a telegram came for her, and she went out. I got a cab for Chelsea.

BASSETT. That's Linklater. He's going, I expect. Thank you, Rix. [*Exit* RIX.

SIR HUBERT. This fog—— [*Rises.*] Well, I'll hope for better luck next time. Tell her I'm much disappointed not to make her acquaintance.

BASSETT. Wait just ten minutes, Sir Hubert. She'll be sure to telegraph if she doesn't come before seven. There's one awfully interesting thing about Linklater, you know. The Hiatus, Jane calls it. That's what he calls it, too. Of course, for the biography she wants all she can get. [SIR HUBERT *strolls about, and takes a copy of "Who's Who" off the desk while* BASSETT *talks.*] And there was one year after he and his wife separated that she could learn nothing about. He was lazy that year—in itself an extraordinary thing. She had to ask him. "What about '92?" she said to him one day. He shook his head. "Hiatus" was all he answered. But she thought of the biography, and, a year later, put the same question to him. That was after "The Beacon" had the luck to catch her. "What about '92?" she asked again. But "Hiatus" was all he said. And she knew by his voice that he meant it, and, of course, took the hint. Now, if she could find what the great man was doing in '92, the biography's made and Jane's fortune with it, I hope.

SIR HUBERT. [*Putting down book.*] Did she care for him? I see he is only fifty-five.

BASSETT. [*Nods.*] Yes, she cared for him all right.

SIR HUBERT. I wonder if he knew it? But, of course, he did. Women were his business.

BASSETT. She hid it.

SIR HUBERT. Perhaps she thought she had.

BASSETT. She could hide anything she liked.

SIR HUBERT. From him?

BASSETT. She hid it, I tell you. If Linklater had known, would he have kept her? [*Enter* RIX *with telegram.*] The mystery solved perhaps. [*Reads.*] By Jove, yes. Here's work: John Linklater's dead.

RIX. It's in the evening contents bill, sir.

[*Exit* RIX.

BASSETT. That's where she went. She'll be back quickly now. Most of the stuff's in type, but I'm afraid, Sir Hubert, she won't feel like talking about Botticelli to-night——

SIR HUBERT. Of course not—of course not. I'll be off before she returns. [*Gets his coat.*

BASSETT. She must have known. I wonder what she was doing. [*Goes to the writing on Miss Sturt's desk.*] Yes, it's the actual obituary. I expect he was gone before she got there. What did he want? I hope it was to tell her about that hidden year. [*Reads, while* SIR HUBERT *dons his coat slowly.*] Even her journalism is literature. [*Reads.* SIR HUBERT *looks at the portrait over the mantelpiece, but does not speak. There is a silence of twenty seconds.* BASSETT *turns a page of the MS.*] Always fine! Would you like to hear what she's doing?

SIR HUBERT. [*Looks at* BASSETT, *smiles to himself, and takes another cigarette.*] Go ahead!

BASSETT. [*Has not looked off the MS. Now he turns back and reads aloud from it.*] "His profound mastery of the feminine has put him beside the greatest, and his niche will be with a Balzac and a Meredith for ever. To his understanding was added the faculty of such an abundant, luminous sympathy as belongs to few, for he projected himself within the arcana of woman's hearts, and lived and suffered with them there. Souls indeed were laid bare to him, but it was his wont to bend in reverence before them, as at the shrine of mysteries most sacred. There was in him a native chivalry, a quality of knightly good manners before unveiled woman, that belongs to another age than the present. A feminist in the noblest sense, John Linklater insisted ever on woman's real powers and real glories, as opposed to those coveted additions she desires and fights for to-day."

SIR HUBERT. There it is. He was behind the times, and out of touch with the modern spirit.

BASSETT. Jane knew it. "Break windows!" he said to her long ago, when she was visiting him. "Break windows, do they? I'm sorry. The business of breaking hearts was grander work."

SIR HUBERT. An old-fashioned attitude.

BASSETT. And he spoke a good thing to me once about 'em. "Eve had all the best of the apple," he said, "and now grudges Adam the core."

SIR HUBERT. Go on with Miss Sturt.

BASSETT. [*Reading.*] "He made woman's higher cause his own; he strove to save her from herself; he enthroned her above her own ambitions. He held that women sought to make themselves manly, and he mourned it. With Nietzsche he could say, 'Only he that is enough of a man will save the woman in woman.' His heroines have been called several sizes too large for the present century; but if many among them stand to the modern woman's soul as the Venus of Melos to her body, that is only to say that John Linklater as an artist was Greek in every aim and aspiration. Truth to his own spiritual ideal never fails him. He has imagined what women may become; but isolated in his own palace of dreams he has not learned what to-day she has become. His inspiration is an impossibility and evolution has spurned his ideal. It belongs to the fairyland of the Golden Age; it takes no count of the struggle and complexity——"

SIR HUBERT. She lets him down gently.

BASSETT. Then she ends like this. [*Turns over paper and reads.*] "His intuition was infallible as woman's own; his touch unerring. Only the grand themes attracted him and he turned by a sort of soul instinct for sheer beauty, from all that was common, graceless, mean. In sorrow his lonely heart [*Enter* MISS JANE STURT. *She stands at the door and listens.* SIR HUBERT *sees her and shrugs his shoulders half-humorously.* BASSETT *does not see her.*] sought anodyne of upper air that only the great spirits breathe. He——

SIR HUBERT. The author is listening, my dear Bassett.

BASSETT. Good Lord!—Sir Hubert Innes—Miss Sturt.

MISS STURT. I'm so sorry to break my appointment. You'll forgive me.

[*She shows traces of suppressed emotion.*

SIR HUBERT. Of course, of course, Miss Sturt. A great pleasure postponed.

[*He bows and leaves the room.*

BASSETT. [*Helping her off with her jacket.*] Were you with him?

MISS STURT. [*Nods her head.*] Just in time. But he sent for me. He couldn't speak though.

BASSETT. Look here, don't you stop. I'll finish this. Go home.

MISS STURT. No, no, no! I'm all right.

BASSETT. Sure?

MISS STURT. Yes. Such a lonely death! And he died so finely—he—oh, go away, Leonard.

BASSETT. I'll come back presently. Don't bother about work to-night, Jenny.

MISS STURT. It's nearly done.

BASSETT. Did he mean to tell you of that vanished year?

MISS STURT. I wonder. Perhaps he did. It's lost for ever now.

[*Enter* RIX *with packet in his hand.*

RIX. A lot of photographs of Mr. Linklater, sir and there's a good few waiting——

BASSETT. All right.

[*He goes out and* RIX *follows him.* MISS STURT *takes off her gloves and goes to the fire. She pokes it and flings into it the cigarette* SIR HUBERT *has left on the mantelpiece. She stands and looks into the fire for a few moments, then kneels down and warms her hands at it. Then she rises pulls herself together and goes to her desk. She reads; then she picks up her pen. A knock at the door.*

MISS STURT. Come in!

[*Enter* RIX *with a tray and a little dainty tea upon it.*

RIX. Mr. Bassett thought, Miss——

[*He puts tea on the table by the arm-chair.*

MISS STURT. Thank you, Rix. What a fog!

RIX. A regular old London particklar, Miss! Haven't seen such a good 'un for years. [*Exit* RIX.

[MISS STURT *goes on writing. Her pen moves quickly. Presently she takes a new page. Then she stops and rises and looks at the portrait of* LINKLATER. *She is looking at it when there comes another knock. She turns to door.* RIX *enters with a slip of paper in his hand.*

RIX. Editor wants you to see somebody, Miss. It's something special—about Mr. Linklater. But only if you're equal to it, Miss.

MISS STURT. [*Takes paper from him.*] All right.

[*Exit* RIX.

MISS STURT. [*Reads slip. Looks up puzzled.*] Amy Prodgers?

[*Enter* RIX. *He stands at the door.*

RIX. This way, ma'am, please.

[*Enter* MRS. PRODGERS. *Exit* RIX.

MRS. PRODGERS. Good evening! Cruel cold to-night!

MISS STURT. It is, indeed. Will you go to the fire, Mrs. Prodgers?

[MRS. PRODGERS *goes to the fire and loosens the boa from her neck. She takes a packet of papers out of her muff and puts it on the mantelpiece.*

MISS STURT. You knew Mr. Linklater?

MRS. PRODGERS. Yes, I did—and better than most people. I've got a bit of a surprise packet about him, you might say. [*She puts a foot to the fire.*

MISS STURT. What do you mean by that?

MRS. PRODGERS. I'm here to tell you, and I'm glad you're a woman, for I've been wondering ever since I started from home how on earth I could tell a man.

MISS STURT. Won't you sit down?

[MRS. PRODGERS *sits down in the arm-chair.*

MRS. PRODGERS. My name is Amy Prodgers—maiden name Jago. I'm Cornish, and I've seen trouble, else I shouldn't be here.

MISS STURT. Who hasn't?

MRS. PRODGERS. I'm not one of the lucky ones. [*Looks at the tea which is at her elbow.*] Life's life, and it makes us do things we never thought to do. It's

like this. A long time ago, when this Mr. Linklater's wife chucked him or he chucked her—I don't know which—he came down to Cornwall, to St. Ives.

[*Looks at tea again.*

MISS STURT. Drink some tea if you want it.

MRS. PRODGERS. I'm perishing for a cup. [*She pours out tea.*] My mother was a widow and let lodgings, and he took 'em and I waited on him. That was in '92. My stars! an awful queer man. He'd come down for storms to put in a book, or something of that. [*Drinks tea.*] That's tea, that is. Four shillings a pound, I'll swear.

MISS STURT. Mr. Linklater was busy writing with you?

MRS. PRODGERS. He was jolly soon busy with me, but not writing.

MISS STURT. What do you mean?

[*She leaves her desk and takes a light chair nearer to the other woman, but she does not sit down. She stands holding the back of the chair.*

MRS. PRODGERS. Let me tell it my own way. He was gloomy and brooding and kept to himself. Wouldn't pal in with none of the artist young men, though a lot of them wanted to make him cheerful. And nicer gentlemen you couldn't find I'm sure. A dozen of 'em painted me and gave good money for it. I was something to look at in them days I can tell you.

MISS STURT. I should think you might have been.

MRS. PRODGERS. Yes, and he found that out jolly

quick. This writing chap—regular gone he was in a month—head over ears as the saying is.

[MISS STURT *turns her back and walks up the room.* MRS. PRODGERS *drinks more tea.* MISS STURT *comes down again slowly.*

MISS STURT. You mean he loved you?

MRS. PRODGERS. Like a flame of fire. There was a dozen fellows after me besides him, but I knew my worth and waited. Then this John Linklater tried love-making. Lord! the queer men there are in the world! Love! I soon tumbled to it why his wife hadn't got no use for him. He'd talk by the yard—stuff I couldn't make top nor tail of. And he'd even write rhymes. [*Laughs and breaks off as she catches* MISS STURT *looking at her.*] You stare, but if it wasn't enough to make a cat laugh, I'd like to know what was. No sense in the man—all balderdash and moonshine. But he'd got our best front rooms at fancy prices, so I suffered it and tried to be pleasant.

MISS STURT. How long did he stay with you?

MRS. PRODGERS. He'd be there now I believe; but he got wild over me and it couldn't go on. I do honestly believe he tried to do his best. He was a kind creature; but as to girls—as to doing things or thinking of things a girl likes—he'd no idea of it. Could have tamed an elephant sooner than understand a woman. Never would go on the pier nor to a circus nor a revel nor nothing like that. But a very good let he was and silly as a child over money. Didn't know the value of it.

MISS STURT. He left you presently?

MRS. PRODGERS. Not yet awhile. I went walking with him—walked my legs off he did; but I suffered it for the sake of his presents. I didn't know then he was a bad man. You may start, but wait till you've heard. We mooned about in the lanes and on the beach, and he'd yarn about reality and God knows what—I didn't. And then plump out he axed me to go to him and live with him and let him find my soul, or some such balderdash. [*She rises in anger.*] Yes, he dared—and him a married man, and me a clean, God-fearing, decent girl as had never had so much as a whisper against her! And I asked him how he'd got the front to come to me with such a shameful plan—as if I was dirt. And he talked a lot of wickedness——

MISS STURT. Then he went away? We can leave the rest.

MRS. PRODGERS. I suppose you're busy. Well, so am I, the Lord knows. I'll cut it short. [*Sits down again.* MISS STURT *walks up and down slowly.*] Yes, after that he went—down to the Land's End. And then he took to writing and sending things. Somehow I liked him a bit better then—so long as he kept his distance. They writing men have funny ideas, and I don't want to judge him now he's dead.

MISS STURT. He wrote to you?

MRS. PRODGERS. Letters full of the most amazing stuff. I didn't read half of 'em; but I answered now and again, because he begged me to do so. I told him

what lodgers we'd got, and the news of the weather and the wrecks, when there was one. A queer come-along-of-it. 'Twas my face and my voice he liked—especially my voice I do believe. [*Pause.*] It went on till I met a young gentleman down by the bandstand one evening. A traveller he was by the name of Alfred Prodgers, and you might call it love at first sight on both sides. Handsome as a picture Alf was —as a young man. [*She sighs and looks into the fire.*

Miss Sturt. He cared for you?

Mrs. Prodgers. Went daft from the first minute ne set eyes on me. We kept company for a bit. He was taking his fortnight's holiday. And he rowed me on the sea, and we went to Hancock's circus together. Then he offered for me, and I took him. Of course I told him of this here dead man's going's on, and he was proud, Alfred was—a wonderful proud man—and he wouldn't have no more of it. "They letters must stop," Alfred says. And they was stopped. I wrote and told Mr. Linklater, and he sent but one more. But I kept 'em—thirty-eight there was. Yes, I kept 'em, though he told me to tear 'em up.

Miss Sturt. Why didn't you, then?

Mrs. Prodgers. [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Life's life, and you never know what may be useful. I wouldn't do nothing wrong, mind. But anyway I kept 'em safe, because you never know what a thing may come to be worth. They tell me he was pretty well known as a writer of tales, though I never

met any one as had ever heard of him. He may have been a great man, perhaps; but he wasn't a very respectable——

MISS STURT. You have the letters with you?

MRS. PRODGERS. They are there on the mantelpiece, and now me and my husband ain't none too flourishing, and so I'm glad I hung on to 'em. We keep a grocer's in —— Street off the Strand. I've buried two and got two living. Alf comes of a consumptive lot, and coughs fit to kill himself in the winter. He's ill now. And if these letters are worth money, we may as well see the colour of it. I caught sight of a poster that he was dead an hour ago, so I popped on my hat and ran to the nearest big newspaper. I'd have gone to the paper we take up—only that's too far off. And one thing I bargain for: my name mustn't appear in it. I won't have decent people laughing at me, and saying a man wouldn't have writ all that flowery stuff and sent me gifts if he hadn't got something for 'em, and all that.

MISS STURT. Are you mentioned by name?

MRS. PRODGERS. No. He didn't like the name of Amy, and invented another. [*She rises and picks up the letters.*] I was "Corinna," or some such nonsense.

MISS STURT. All the letters were written in '92?

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Handing* MISS STURT *the packet.*] Yes, and when Alf said they were to stop, he did stop. He sent me a dollop of money when I was married, and I was afraid of my life that Alfred would find out

and think it meant something. So I burned his "good-bye" letter, and pretended as my mother gave me the cash. [MISS STURT *opens the packet.*] Oh, that ain't fair. I can't let you see 'em if you won't buy them.

MISS STURT. I must satisfy myself that the writing is his.

MRS. PRODGERS. Did you know him then? [MISS STURT *nods. Then, having glanced into the parcel, she shuts it up again and puts it on the table.*] So much the better. Then you can see for yourself 'tis his penmanship—so to call it. You should see Alf's hand.

MISS STURT. Yes, that is Mr. Linklater's writing. How much d'you want for them?

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Looking at* MISS STURT *slyly.*] Fifty pounds.

MISS STURT. [*Looking at the letters.*] Fifty?

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Suspecting that she is asking too much.*] If that's a bit too stiff say forty-five.

MISS STURT. I'll give you fifty.

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Showing annoyance, and biting her lip.*] Of course, if they're worth more——

MISS STURT. I give you your price. [*She goes to her desk, unlocks a private drawer in it, and takes out a cheque-book. Knock at the door.*] Come in.

[*Enter a boy in an apron. He is dirty, and his sleeves are turned up well over his elbows.*

BOY. Copy, please, Miss.

MISS STURT. Here you are, Tom! Come again for the rest in twenty minutes.

BOY. [*Taking manuscript from her—the same that* BASSETT *read aloud.*] Thank you, Miss. [*Exit boy.*

[MRS. PRODGERS *has been walking about looking at the pictures. She stops and stares at the Venus.*

MRS. PRODGERS. I wonder you like that naked horror—stuck up for everybody to look at it!

MISS STURT. No doubt you see many things that make you wonder.

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Catching sight of the portrait of* JOHN LINKLATER.] Surely to God that's him!

MISS STURT. Yes.

MRS. PRODGERS. Never saw an uglier man. Creepy ugly, you might say.

MISS STURT. I'm writing you a cheque for fifty pounds. Amy Prodgers was the name?

MRS. PRODGERS. Couldn't you make it guineas?

MISS STURT. Well, I will.

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Taking up the letters and fingering them.*] They was only written for my eye, of course, and nobody else have ever seen 'em. There's a lot here that's never been read since he wrote it, for I couldn't get through very often. "None must see what I have written to you," that was his very word. [MISS STURT *stops writing and listens to* MRS. PRODGERS.] And none has seen 'em. But now he's dead it don't signify. Truth's truth.

MISS STURT. You'll be doing no harm by letting me have the letters.

MRS. PRODGERS. Did you know him?

MISS STURT. I knew him.

MRS. PRODGERS. You're terrible clever, no doubt. I dare say you could understand him.

MISS STURT. Not always.

MRS. PRODGERS. We never can understand 'em always. They've got passions in 'em no woman can understand. No *good* woman, that is.

MISS STURT. [*Rising and holding out the cheque.*] Here's your money.

MRS. PRODGERS. And there's the goods. [*Gives her the parcel.*] They're queer stuff. I daresay some loose-minded, silly creatures would have gone to him on 'em. But I wasn't taking any. I tried to read one of his books once when I was laid by. Well! Alf said he wouldn't choke a dog with it. It soon gave me the headache.

MISS STURT. Good night. I must go to my work now. [*Puts down the Linklater letters on the table.*

MRS. PRODGERS. [*Looks at cheque; then she brings out a purse and folds up cheque and puts it in.*] You'll be very careful my name don't slip in. Lord knows what my friends would say—or my husband.

MISS STURT. Trust me.

MRS. PRODGERS. Good evening, then. I shall take your paper to-morrow.

MISS STURT. You will see nothing in it to alarm you.

MRS. PRODGERS. [*At door.*] Where will they bury the man?

MISS STURT. I cannot tell you.

MRS. PRODGERS. If I've got time, I've half a mind to go. He came to my wedding on the quiet. One good turn deserves another, don't it?

[*Laughs and goes out.*

MISS STURT. [*Stands and looks after her lost in thought. Then she comes to herself, turns and picks up the letters with a sort of wonder and reverence. She stands again holding them to her breast, like a bunch of flowers. She walks slowly to the hearth and looks up at* LINKLATER'S *face frowning down upon her.*] Poor Jack.

[*She looks at the letters for the last time, then kneels by the fire and slowly puts them upon it. She watches them burn away, then rises and extinguishes the electric light that illuminates the room. She returns to her desk, sits down, draws her papers to her and goes on writing for a few moments. Then she ceases, drops her pen, leans back in her chair with her elbows on the arms of it and her clasped hands under her chin.*

CURTAIN.

THE CARRIER-PIGEON

CHARACTERS

HARRY HAWKE, aged 71. *An old poacher*
ELIAS COBLEIGH, aged 65. *His neighbour.*
MILLY HAWKE, aged 65. *Harry's wife.*

THE CARRIER-PIGEON

SCENE: UPPER CHAMBER OF A DARTMOOR COTTAGE.

The bedroom of Harry Hawke. A low-ceiled room, with a double bed in it, which a patchwork quilt partly covers. Beside the bed is a table on which are bottles, a cup, a glass, a teaspoon and a few wild flowers in a jam jar. Opposite the bed is a window. A fire burns in grate, and a kettle is on the hob. Upon the mantelshelf stand an eight-day clock and various chimney ornaments. An old screen, covered with pictures from illustrated newspapers, stands round the foot of the bed, and beside it is an easy chair with cushions in it. On a chest of drawers stands a brandy bottle with tablespoon and wineglass.

HARRY HAWKE *and* MILLY HAWKE *discovered. He lies propped up in bed, and wears an old coat over his night-shirt. She sits in the arm-chair beside him knitting. For a few moments the man breathes quietly with shut eyes. Then he sits up and coughs.*

MILLY. Be you awake, my dear?

HARRY. Aye—and a proper dream I've had.

MILLY. About Heaven, Harry?

HARRY. No! Nor yet t'other place. I was down in Squire Bagworthy's hanging woods having a go at

the pheasants! A moonshiny night 'twas, and the birds, roosting overhead, looked so big as haystacks. I was dropping 'em one after t'other and cramming 'em in my bag. I wish I hadn't woke.

MILLY. Don't you think on things like that no more.

HARRY. I can't believe I be going to die somehow, I can't think my old heart be going to crack. That full o' fight I feel. 'Tis a baggering shame to be picked off like this, and me not seventy-two till June. To think I'll shed no more blood, Milly—not a feather, not a fleck o' fur, not a fish!

MILLY. You've done your share o' that.

HARRY. If I'd known when I was up over for snipe that 'twas the last time—— And such a lot left undone—such a lot. To think I'll never be evens with that beast next door.

MILLY. Elias Cobleigh?

HARRY. Aye! I'd like to have lived till I'd got a bit of my own off that man.

MILLY. I met him yester-even. He hoped you was mending.

HARRY. Knowing right well I couldn't.

MILLY. The Justices was sure to take his word afore yours. He swore he seed you coming out of the Park.

HARRY. And so he did. But what had I done to him that he should give me up?

MILLY. Elias Cobleigh knows only too well you took one of his young pigs.

HARRY. He can't know it, because he couldn't prove it. 'Tis all of a piece. I've had to fight for my fun all my life. A free-trader, with a bit o' the old spirit in him, can't get a show in the world nowadays. 'Tis very well to say I'm a useless, selfish, good-for-nought old man. But I was born so, and if I'd lived in the days afore policemen and game-laws I'd have been a hero.

MILLY. Never mind all that now, Harry.

HARRY. I hate going—I properly hate going. Never to see another spring—and I know so well how 'tis all working! There's the plover running in the water-meadows by the river now, and the frogs hollering, and the yellow puss-tails on the witheys, and the primroses in the lanes, and old Shillingford at his mangold-wurzels, heaving 'em out of the ridge, where they was earthed up for winter. And the fish moving so hungry as hunters for the new-hatched flies. But never another fish for me.

MILLY. Think of better things, Harry.

HARRY. [*Crossly.*] What better things be there? I doan't know none—and doan't want to.

MILLY. Try to make your peace with God.

HARRY. [*Takes his pipe off table and lights it.*] I ban't feared to face my Maker. I'll tell Him to do unto others as He'd be done by. Then what can He say? I've been a bad old man, but by gum, I have enjoyed it! You'll miss me, Milly, though you think you won't.

MILLY. I shall miss you, sure enough, Harry.

HARRY. I always put you a good second to Widow Bonus. I won't deny that she took my measure uncommon well, and I found her a more understanding woman than you. Her husband was a sportsman in his day and she didn't harbour no silly opinions on the subject. 'Twas a great loss when she dropped. Not that you ever liked her.

MILLY. Best to leave that. I don't want to say harsh words in your dying ears.

HARRY. She's gone to her reward afore me. But I should much like to be buried alongside her, if it could be done. You might try and get parson to see to it. Then I should await the Last Trump between Widow Bonus and Mary Glubb—fine women both.

[MILLY *starts up to mend the fire, pokes it with temper, and bangs the bars about.*

HARRY. No good you getting in a rage. You know very well how 'twas——

MILLY. [*Angry.*] I know I'd have been rids of you thirty year ago if I could.

HARRY. Ah! A bill of divorcement be like cowcumber and salmon in spring—luxuries for the rich. Never mind. There's no divorce like the grave. No marrying nor giving in marriage up over. [*Points upward.*] That's a comforting thought for plenty besides you and me.

MILLY. Leave it—leave it! I've been a good wife, whatever you may have been.

HARRY. Such a lot of you women think, because you've been good wives, there's nothing left to talk about. There's a score o' things I'd put afore goodness. If you'd been a good cook, for instance, very likely I shouldn't lie here now. 'Tis my innards have had to fight half a century of your parlous cooking, and they've gone down afore it at last—long afore their time.

MILLY. 'Tis your heart, not your innards. I was a professed cook, and well you know it.

HARRY. Yes, you professed a lot more than you practised, my old dear—like most women. However, us had best to let bygones be bygones. I was thinking of my grave last night. Don't you let 'em put me on the north side o' the tower, where the moles work the ground. I don't mind the grey birds running over me by the trees; but I won't be at the mercy of they moles burrowing down there. There's strange powers in Nature us know nothing about, and they moles might remember the scores and dozens I've caught of 'em for moleskin waistcoats and such-like.

MILLY. [*Brings food from the fire.*] You'd best drink a drop of this chicken broth while 'tis brave and hot.

HARRY. When be I to have my next drop of brandy?

MILLY. Not afore five o'clock.

HARRY. 'Tis that now very near. Put down the screen and let me look out o' the window a bit. The big elm be thickening to bud.

MILLY. Drink first, there's a good man.

HARRY. Who sent this stuff to me?

MILLY. Mrs. Sweetland; and Miss Tapper have left a bottle of elderberry wine of her own making —and a good book.

HARRY. Elderberry wine—like her cheek! Pretty drinking for a dying man! A good book too! Be I the sort to read a good book?

MILLY. 'Tis well meant. [*Gets the book.*] "Hope for the Sinner," 'tis called.

HARRY. [*Angry.*] Burn it then—burn it I tell you, or I'll get out of bed and burn it myself!

MILLY. I'll read a bit to 'e. You never know where comfort may be hidden.

HARRY. [*Very angry.*] Burn it this instant moment, or I'll throw the house out o' windows! A damned tabby cat! There'll be hope for all sinners—big and little—afore there's hope for her. No decent gaol bird would neighbour with her in heaven or hell! Burn it—d'you hear me?

MILLY. Don't rage—'tis very bad for 'e.

[*Puts book on fire.*

HARRY. And I wish Tabby Tapper herself was fizzling there. And pour that mess down the sink. Elderberry wine for the likes o' me!

MILLY. Drink your soup, there's a good man. And don't lose your temper. You'll want to keep up all your strength against your end.

HARRY. [*Drinks the soup out of the basin.*] Don't you fear I'll make a scene at the finish. I know my

way all right. I'll die game. 'Twon't be the first time I've faced death.

MILLY. We all know you for a very brave man, Harry, when you was a sojer in your young days.

HARRY. By the same token, don't you sell my medals. There's the V.C. and t'other.

MILLY. There's none to leave 'em to. I don't want 'em.

HARRY. Give 'em to keeper Dawsett, then. I've helped him to earn his money many a time, and he always fought fair.

MILLY. He shall have 'em.

HARRY. I be dying without a grudge against any living soul but that beastly man next door. Elias Cobleigh's a traitor, and if you was a sporting wife, you'd ease my mind, and promise to get home on him, soon or late.

MILLY. What can I do?

HARRY. A score of things. Pour a bucket o' bilin' water on his lettuce beds some night; let his tame rabbits out o' the hutch, when his back be turned. Set traps in the garden for his blasted pigeons, as have stolen my peas for twenty years.

MILLY. 'Twould get me in more trouble than him.

HARRY. Make love to him then, so soon as I be gone. Marry him. I ax no more.

MILLY. You'd best go to sleep again. You don't know what you'm saying. [*Clock strikes five.*

HARRY. There's five! Give me my brandy and pull away the screen. I want to see the reds in the

sky. [MILLY *moves screen. There is sunset light in the window. She pours him out a tablespoonful of brandy.*] Make it two, for luck.

MILLY. Dursn't—doctor said but one.

HARRY. A tablespoon to a man as could take half a bottle and not wink his eye-lid!

MILLY. You'll have bigger doses no doubt afore the finish.

HARRY. [*Taking his tablespoon.*] What's the good then—when the intellects be out and I can't taste it? I want it now—not shoved down my throat after I'm a goner.

MILLY. You'd best to sleep a bit, and I'll run down house and get my tea.

HARRY. I don't want to sleep. I be strong as a lion. I believe any other doctor but our old fool would save me. If that wise woman, as lived at Rundlestone, had been spared, I'll warrant she'd have pulled me round.

MILLY. She put the evil eye on many an innocent creature.

HARRY. Stuff! The folk was all cowards and feared out o' their lives about her. Fetch me my gun, Milly. I be feeling so game as a bantam for the minute. I'd like to run my fingers over un!

MILLY. What's the sense o' that?

HARRY. Sense! Men don't live by sense alone. But you'll never understand, you bleak creature.

MILLY. The likes of you be all children to your dying day.

HARRY. Fetch me my gun then, and let me play with it.

[MILLY *goes out at door by the bed. As soon as she has gone,* HARRY *gets out of bed. He is very weak, but with the help of furniture, gets to the chest of drawers and drinks some more brandy. He looks out of the window a moment and the red light falls on his face as he stares into the sky. Then he gets back laboriously into bed and lies panting till his wife returns. She brings an ancient gun with her.*

HARRY. [*Beams at the gun and takes it from her. He pats the stock of the gun.*] Ah! you old devil, me and you have seen the fur and feathers fly in our time! By the Lord, 'tis loaded!

MILLY. [*Nervous.*] For goodness' sake take the cartridges out then.

HARRY. You be safe enough—but, but—oh, Milly, I should dearly like for to kill something afore I die! I don't mean you; but if 'twas only a blackbird, or a screech thrush, 'twould be summat. Ope the winder, there's a kind woman. The elm be right in the line of fire. I'll get a shot for sartain afore dark. There's often a rook do perch there flying home in the dimpsy light.

MILLY. Be you mad?

HARRY. Yes, if you like; but ope the winder!

MILLY. Harry, list to me!

HARRY. Ope the winder! I'll take the risks.

MILLY. It may do for 'e!

HARRY. What matter? A brave end for such as me. There! there's birds there now—quick—quick!

MILLY. Doctor'll never forgive me.

HARRY. Quick, I tell 'e!

[MILLY *throws open the window.*

HARRY. That's it! Now you come round here out o' the way.

MILLY. There's Cobleigh feeding his chickens down there.

HARRY. Ah! I wish he'd climb up in the tree. I shouldn't miss him.

MILLY. 'Twill shake the house down if you fire.

HARRY. Rubbish! [*Lifts gun, then puts it down again.*] My! ain't the old devil got heavy? [*Lifts again.*] 'Tis only a cocksparrow. I don't want he. Prop me up a bit higher, Milly.

[MILLY, *in sore tribulation, keeps putting her hands up to her ears.*

MILLY. Think better of it. Wait till to-morrow.

HARRY. Mayn't be here—to—hold on! There's a blue pigeon—a whacker! [*Raises the gun.*

MILLY. [*Looking out of the window.*] For God's sake, don't fire! 'Tis Elias Cobleigh's famous carrier—worth five pounds and more!

HARRY. [*Fires.*] He's down—fetch un—fetch un quick, afore Cobleigh gets to un! I want to feel the blood on my hands!

MILLY. Oh, my God, he'll be the death of us now! [*Hurries off.*

HARRY. Quits wi' Elias! [*Falls forward.*] What's this?

[*Puts his hands out feebly. Struggles and flings off bed-clothes. Gets out of bed and stands swaying a moment; then falls back into easy chair, beside the bed. His mouth is open and he is dying.* MILLY *hastens in with the dead pigeon.*

MILLY. He's coming—he's after me, Harry! [*Seeing him.*] Harry—Harry!

[HARRY *stretches out his hands. She puts the pigeon into them. He slips down in chair, holding the pigeon to his breast. She kneels down beside him.*

ELIAS COBLEIGH. [*Off.*] You damned scoundrel, I'll have the law of you for this, if it costs me all my savings. [*Enter* COBLEIGH *in a towering rage.*] If you wasn't——

MILLY. [*Kneeling by* HARRY.] He's dead, master.

[HARRY'S *head is back, and he is smiling.*

CURTAIN.

THE POPULAR LIBRARY OF ART

Pocket volumes of biographical and critical value, with very many reproductions of the artists' works. Each volume averages 200 pages, 16mo, with from 40 to 50 illustrations, quarter-bound cloth. *3s. net a volume. Postage 4d.*

LIST OF VOLUMES

BOTTICELLI. By Julia Cartwright.
RAPHAEL. By Julia Cartwright.
FREDERICK WALKER. By Clementina Black.
REMBRANDT. By Auguste Bréal.
VELAZQUEZ. By Auguste Bréal.
GAINSBOROUGH. By Arthur B. Chamberlain.
CRUIKSHANK. By W. H. Chesson.
BLAKE. By G. K. Chesterton.
G. F. WATTS. By G. K. Chesterton.
ALBRECHT DÜRER. By Lina Eckenstein.
THE ENGLISH WATER-COLOUR PAINTERS. By A. J. Finberg.
HOGARTH. By Edward Garnett.
LEONARDO DA VINCI. By Georg Gronau.
HOLBEIN. By Ford Madox Hueffer.
ROSSETTI. By Ford Madox Hueffer.
THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD. By Ford Madox Hueffer.
PERUGINO. By Edward Hutton.
MILLET. By Romain Rolland.
WATTEAU. By Camille Mauclair.
THE FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS. By Camille Mauclair.
WHISTLER. By Bernhart Sickert.

MASTERS OF PAINTING

With many illustrations in Photogravure

A series which gives in each volume a large number of examples reproduced in *photogravure* of the works of its subject. The first series of books on art issued at a popular price to use this beautiful method of reproduction.

The letterpress is the same as the volumes in the Popular Library of Art, but it is reset, the size of the volumes being $8\frac{3}{4}$ ins. by $5\frac{3}{4}$ ins. There are no less than 32 plates in each book. Bound in cloth with gold on side, gold lettering on back: picture wrapper, 5*s. net* a volume, postage 5*d.*

The six volumes are:

RAPHAEL. By Julia Cartwright.

BOTTICELLI. By Julia Cartwright.

G. F. WATTS. By G. K. Chesterton.

LEONARDO DA VINCI. By Georg Gronau.

HOLBEIN. By Ford Madox Hueffer.

ROSSETTI. By Ford Madox Hueffer.

The volumes are designed to give as much value as possible, and are the last word in popular book production.

It would be difficult to conceive of more concise, suggestive, and helpful volumes than these. All who read them will be aware of a sensible increase in their knowledge and appreciation of art and the world's masterpieces.